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AUTHOR Sharpes, Don
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ABSTRACT

In the formation of the United States, individual states yielded powers they rightfully possessed and thereby strengthened the nation. The situation for the education profession is analogous to this historical act: we must begin to think through the process of differentiating responsibility and representativeness of the teaching profession while preserving and strengthening the profession as a whole. In today's schools, teachers are differentiated either by grades or by the subject taught or by both. Instead, teachers could be differentiated by the same characteristics that mark administrative differentiation: that is, curriculum and instruction, research, community services, and urban affairs. A variety of teachers, a variety of essential teaching tasks, and a variety of techniques for each task are needed. (JA)

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DIFFERENTIATING TEACHERS:
STRENGTH TO THE PROFESSION

By

Don Sharpes

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
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DIFFERENTIATING TEACHERS: STRENGTH TO THE PROFESSION

Before the Continental Congress ratified the Articles of Confederation, the State of Maryland insisted that the claims that other states had to western lands be ceded to the new union of the colonies. In the Resolution for Equal Statehood for Acquired Territory, passed on October 10, ~~1780~~ 1780, Congress agreed not to make colonies of these lands but to form them into states of equal powers when admitted to the Union. It was a magnanimous gesture by the new states for not perpetrating colonial powers, as England had done.

The United States strengthened itself as a nation paradoxically by yielding powers it rightfully possessed. Its strength lay in its differentiation of a vast territory and its apparent abrogation of responsibility. The differentiating of its powers and responsibilities allowed for the possibility of a stronger, more representative union.

I introduce the historical anecdote to make an analogical point to the education profession— that we begin to think through the process of differentiating responsibility and representativeness of the teaching profession, while preserving and strengthening the profession as a whole.

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By the same token, the assignments of teaching and administration responsibilities have also developed from historical tradition. How well the structural pattern functions depends on the human skills and committments as well as the characteristics of the school system itself.

Generally there are two features that determine the manner in which the school system is organized and administered. They are:

1. the prevalent theory and practice, including the professional doctrine embraced;
2. the personnel, both individual characteristics and in interpersonal relations.

The operation of a large metropolitan school system has differentiated the supportive services and administrative responsibilities. The top administrative leadership coordinates the activities of financial managers, comptrollers and associate superintendents. The administrative management of individual schools is coordinated by assistant superintendents, as are all specialized services—curriculum and instructional, psychological and personnel services, educational research, the food services, federal programs, interscholastic athletics, and sometimes community services and urban affairs.

Anyone close to the modern urban complex knows that the administrative preparation, roles and theories are obsolete. As administrators, we have nothing to apologize

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for. Obsolescence, brought about by technological development and social change should not make anyone defensive. We simply need to undertake, without delay, the building of new administrative theories, new assumptions and new roles.

For example, how do we perceive interns, administrative and teaching? What experiences are they exposed to? Just the ones we know about, or others they may have to face? Are they expensive clerks and supervisors? Work in the community means more rather than less study and reading. The administrative fraternity has a backlog of study and reading to do in sociology, anthropology, political science, government and urban renewal.

But within the individual schools, within the classrooms—not with the administrative and supporting services—where is the differentiation? How are teachers differentiated to perform the essential tasks for which the schools have their existence?

There are only two possible answers in all but a very few schools today. Teachers are differentiated for the most part either by grades or by subject taught or both.

The question is, How should they or could they be

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differentiated as teachers? One answer is, by all the same characteristics that mark administrative differentiation; that is, curriculum and instruction, research, community services, urban affairs, and the like.

What we have now is not working. Children do not have equal opportunity. Parents are frustrated. Teachers are baffled and wary of losing status. Whole communities need educating.

The problem of administration becomes complex when the distinctions between teacher and learner disintegrate. We may have to look in the future, as ecologists are saying, to the greatest resources rather than to the so-called "professional elite." Volunteers, self-help organizations and community action groups are solving their own problems more expeditiously than the agencies created to resolve them: drug addicts often help each other through the cure better than the hired psychiatrists.

The people who have the problems often have a better understanding of their needs than do the professionals charged with the responsibility for meeting those needs. Administrators will have to learn to find and cooperate with new resources and evoke a new and more common intelligence to meet the changing school conditions. We must mobilize the resources latent in the community.

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To achieve the results, our society requires a variety of teachers. In only a few schools is such a variety of teachers to be found. The diversity of experiences, skills, education and knowledge and understanding among the nation's 2 million plus teaching staff is great. Yet few schools are organized to use different learning tasks.

The Report of the Mayor's Advisory Panel on the decentralization of New York City Schools makes the following observation:

> "The panel's single most important—and potentially controversial—recommendation on personnel is to liberate the recruitment and promotion system from restrictions that have outlived their purpose and to strengthen and broaden the concept of merit."

The majority of teachers still talk or lecture to students, give assignments in books or lab manuals, and grade papers. The cycle is complete when they plan their next lecture. But where can we find universally such essential teaching activities as:

1. the demonstration of a film or slide or tape (not just a showing) or what to learn and how to learn it?
2. the practice of student use of technology?
3. the practice of student-inspired discussions as responses to their learning needs?
4. plans of further teaching activities based on individual or group learning difficulties?

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5. the consistent discovery by the teacher and student of places and things to learn outside the class and school?

The limitations of teaching procedures is not generally caused by the imaginativeness of either students or teachers but by the organization within the school itself of time, curriculum and instructional rigidities.

Besides a variety of essential teaching tasks, such as those listed above, there must also be a variety of techniques for each task. The presence in the school of a person responsible for remediating reading difficulties means that he must use slides, films, TV and other sources and technologies, rather than complex directions from a book. The variety of new methods may come from other teachers.

The education profession needs people, like the medical profession, to conduct diagnoses, therapy, emotional encouragement, family and community relations, and sequencings of steps to convalescence. The energy and time the profession now wastes on developing "the good teacher" would be more economically spent in recognizing the differing steps in the educational process and organize teachers so as best to capitalize on differing student potential and abilities.